



55 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
Telephone: (860) 424-5274
Toll Free: 1-866-218-6631
Website: www.ct.gov/aging
Email: aging.sda@ct.gov

Written Testimony before the Aging Services Committee

Elizabeth B. Ritter on behalf of the State Department on Aging

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Senator Flexer, Representative Serra, Senator Kelly, Representative Bolinsky and distinguished members of the Aging Committee. My name is Betsy Ritter. I am the Acting Commissioner of the State Department on Aging. I am here today to offer testimony regarding SB: 287: AN ACT CREATING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES FOR NUTRITIONAL SERVICES FOR SENIOR CITIZENS.

As the designated sole State Unit on Aging for Connecticut, the State Department on Aging (SDA) administers programs not only funded by the Older Americans Act but also funded through various state appropriations and other federal grants in order to ensure that Connecticut's elders have access to the supportive services necessary to live with dignity, security, and independence. The Department is also responsible for planning and program development and operation of a comprehensive and integrated service delivery system for older persons in Connecticut including congregate and home-delivered meals. Last year alone the Elderly Nutrition Program, operated through the five regional area agencies on aging, served more than two million meals.

In June 2014, the State Department on Aging (SDA) submitted its State Plan on Aging for 2015-2017 as approved by Governor Malloy to the Federal Administration for Community Living for subsequent review and approval. One of the focus areas of this Plan is the promotion of Healthy Aging for the whole person. The State Plan reflects the commitment of the Department to supporting innovative nutrition services to increase flexibility of the program and to maximizing the use of all available funding sources to maintain or expand the program where possible. These services include not only a nutritious meal but also the opportunity for socialization and nutrition education services to maintain a healthier life style.

The Plan, similar to the subsequent Act passed by the legislature (Public Act 14-73: An Act Concerning Livable Communities and Elderly Nutrition) also includes leading regular meetings with the Department of Social Services and other nutrition stakeholders in order to move toward greater coordination between programs serving



older adults. Under the broader topic of Elderly Nutrition, the scope of these ongoing meetings is not restricted to existing state and federal programs. Such meetings have begun and as the meetings unfold we envision that a natural progression of stakeholder discussions is likely to include: the discussion of the various funding streams (state, federal, municipal, etc.); public and private nutrition programs; Connecticut's population of senior citizens (those age 60 and older) and the subsection of the senior citizen population currently known to be connected to the various programs. As quarterly meetings with nutrition service stakeholders are already required by statute, the department believes that an additional task force to study alternative funding sources for nutritional services for the elderly would duplicate current efforts and is unnecessary.

Within the Department, Registered Dietitian Jannett Haughton, who also holds a degree in Clinical Dietetics/ Nutrition and a Master's degree in Public Health, possesses an abundance of expertise to provide oversight, education and direction to our elderly nutrition projects throughout the state. Together with staff experienced in program operation and development, the Department stands ready to inform and work with stakeholders to continue, in whatever way possible, to improve services and access to older persons in Connecticut.

The SDA welcomes the opportunity to provide additional information including best practices to the Committee and I encourage the Committee to utilize our resources and, in particular, the efforts outlined in the Plan and resulting from PA 14-73 regarding elderly nutrition... Thank you for your time and attention.

